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BIDEN NIXES TRUMP BID TO KILL SPOUSE WORK PERMITS

Joe Biden administration has withdrawn Trump's proposal to refuse work authorisation to spouses of H1-B holders

OBAMA ERA DECISION RESTORED

Until 2015, H4 visa holders (spouses of H1-B workers) could not legally hold paid employment in the US. Former US President Barack Obama changed the regulation. However, the Trump administration proposed to reverse Obama's decision, saying it is economically significant and is in line with the Buy American and Hire American executive order

INDIANS AMONG BIGGEST BENEFICIARIES

- The decision to rescind Trump proposal came on the day Biden signed an executive order calling for racial equity in the country
- Indian and Chinese workers account for the majority share of H1B visas and H4 visas. Indians filed 74% of all H1B petitions in 2019 while the number was 11.8% for the Chinese P9

1,25,000
NO. OF H4 VISAS ISSUED BY THE U.S. IN 2019 CALENDAR YEAR

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILUPURAM • KOLLAM • WARANGAL • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

Police go after farmer leaders

Claim they instigated mobs, which triggered the violence; add their names to the FIRs; unions call off budget day march to Parliament

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi

A day after Delhi convulsed as mobs resorted to violence amid the farmers' tractor rally, the police on Wednesday launched a crackdown, adding names of several farmer union leaders to the 25 first information reports (FIRs) filed in connection with the riots.

Delhi Police Commissioner SN Srivasatava squarely blamed leaders like Satnam Singh Pannu, Darshan Pal Singh and others for giving provocative speeches at Mukarba Chowk to instigate the mob. Others like Bhuta Singh and Bhurj Gill at the Tikri border and Rakesh Singh Tikait at Ghazipur instigated the people, which led to the violence, he charged.

"No one will be spared and strict action will be taken against everyone involved, who incited the violence," he said.

The police later sent show cause notices to farmer leaders like Darshan Pal Singh and asked them to identify members of their union who took part in the riots.

The police are scanning CCTV footage and using the facial recognition tool to identify more culprits. As many as 394 police personnel were injured and many of them are in serious condition in the ICU.

The Samyukta Kisan Morcha, the umbrella body of agitating farmer unions, on Wednesday announced its decision to postpone the proposed march to Parliament on February 1, the budget day and observe fast on the death anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi on January 30 as atonement.

Bharatiya Kisan Union Punjab (Rajewal) president Balbir Singh Rajewal said, "The morcha regrets the Red Fort incident and accepts moral responsibility for it." Rajewal and Swaraj Abhiyan president Yogendra Yadav alleged that Punjabi actor-singer Deep Sidhu and the Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee were behind the mob violence and added that they would expose the 'conspiracy' of the government.

In a related development, the Rashtriya Kisan Mazdoor Sangathan (RKMS) announced its withdrawal of support to the farmers' agitation. "We cannot continue to join forces with people who have a different direction," said VM Singh, its national president, in Ghazipur.

Vandalised ticket counters on the premises of the historic Red Fort bear testimony to Tuesday's mob fury during the kisan tractor parade | PRAVEEN NEGI

FIGURING IT OUT

394 police personnel injured | 19 people arrested, 50 detained | 25 FIRs filed so far

37 FARMER LEADERS NAMED IN FIRs

Leaders named in FIRs include Medha Patkar, Yogendra Yadav, Darshan Pal, Kulwant Singh Sandhu, Satnam Singh Pannu, Joginder Singh Ugrahan, Surjeet Singh Phool, Jagjeet Singh Dalewal, Balbir Singh Rajewal, H S Lakhowal, Gumam Singh Chanduni, Rakesh Tikait

The curious case of Deep Sidhu

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

IN his quest for his 15 seconds of fame, he was seen on social media instigating mobs to hoist a religious flag at the Red Fort on Tuesday. However, Punjabi actor Deep Sidhu stands today as the most reviled person, disowned by the farmer leaders, his own state and politicians across the spectrum.

While some opposition parties accused the government of planting him to discredit the farmers' agitation, the BJP sought to distance itself from him.

There were conflicting reports on his name figuring in the bunch of FIRs filed in the case. While earlier it was claimed that he did not figure in any of them, DCP, North Delhi, Anto Alphonse, later confirmed that Sidhu and gangster-turned-activist Lakha Sidhana have indeed been named in the FIRs.

The Samyukta Kisan Morcha alleged that 'anti-social elements' like Sidhu attempted to torpedo their peaceful agitation as part of a government plot. Pointing to his past links with the BJP, farmer leaders alleged he misguided some protesters. "Sidhu is an RSS man. Police let him go after he hoisted flag," said farmer leader Darshan Pal. Sidhu was recently summoned by the NIA in connection with a sedition case against the banned pro-Khalistan outfit Sikhs For Justice. CONTINUED: P9

ASSAULT ON MINOR

Apex court stays skewed Bombay HC judgment on groping in POCSO case

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi

THE Supreme Court on Wednesday stayed a Bombay High Court order acquitting a man accused of child abuse on the ground that groping a child's breasts without skin-to-skin contact didn't amount to sexual assault under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

A bench headed by CJI SA Bobde stayed the acquittal after Attorney General K K Venugopal submitted that the judgment would set a dangerous precedent. Venugopal, in a urgent mentioning, urged the top court to take cognisance of the High Court's verdict that said groping a child's breasts without 'skin-to-skin contact' would not amount to 'sexual assault under POCSO Act."It is a very disturbing conclusion. Your Lordships should take note of this. I will have a petition filed tomorrow or Your Lordships may take suo motu notice," Venugopal said.

The court allowed him to file a Special Leave Petition against the January 19 verdict of the Nagpur bench of the Bombay HC and also issued notice to the Maharashtra government and the accused.

Several organisations have already moved the top court stating that the verdict contained observations about the victim's modesty, which were both derogatory and defamatory. The verdict by Justice Pushpa Ganediwala said there must be skin-to-skin contact with sexual intent for an act to be considered a sexual assault.

SC stays BSY arrest in land case, will hear plea against HC order

KANU SARDA & ANUSHA RAVI
@ New Delhi/Bengaluru

THE Supreme Court of India on Wednesday granted huge relief to Karnataka Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa as it stayed his arrest in an old case. The Apex Court agreed to hear Yediyurappa's Special Leave Petition challenging the Karnataka High Court's order allowing restoration of a criminal case against him and now cabinet colleague Murugesh Nirani.

A three-judge bench of CJI S A Bobde, Justice A S Bopanna and Justice V Ramasubramanian, however, did not stay the High Court's order, but has stayed arrests in the case in the meantime.

Yediyurappa had approached the Supreme Court against the Karnataka High Court order restoring a case filed by businessman Alam Pasha. Senior counsel Mukul Rohatgi, representing Yediyurappa, told the court that the CM was seeking protection from arrest that can be warranted due to the High court's order reinstating the case.

While Yediyurappa can still face charges under the case, his petition to review the High Court order has been allowed. During the hearing, the CJI asked Yediyurappa's counsel who would issue a warrant against him, given that he is the Chief Minister. The decision of the Supreme Court brings much-needed relief to the CM who is facing another denotification case filed by activist Jayakumar Hiremath. While neither the CM nor Murugesh Nirani commented on the Supreme Court's order, terming it subjudice, Nirani's office insisted that the case was a result of political vendetta. Alam Pasha, the original complainant in the case, had earlier this week held a press conference demanding Nirani's ouster from the cabinet. Pasha had even threatened to go on a hunger strike and write to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The case in question dates back to 2011 when Yediyurappa was Chief Minister and Nirani was Industries minister. In his complaint, businessman Alam Pasha had accused the two of criminal conspiracy and using forged documents to allegedly withdraw a grant of 26 acres for a ₹600 crore housing project in Devanahalli that was committed to him during an investors' meet. P5

Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa and minister Murugesh Nirani

HC transfers CM plea for quashing FIR to spl court

Kalaburagi: The Kalaburagi Bench of the HC on Wednesday transferred a writ petition filed by CM B S Yediyurappa to a special court dealing with cases against public representatives. The CM has sought cancellation of an FIR filed against him at Devadurga police station for allegedly luring Sharanagouda Patil, son of JD(S) MLA Naganagouda Patil, to resign from his post. P5

7-day House session begins today, 11 Bills may be tabled

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

THE seven-day legislative session starting on Thursday could witness much heat as the opposition Congress is set to take on the government on a number of issues, including the farm laws, cow slaughter ordinance and state of the economy.

The proceedings will commence with Governor Vajubhai Vala's address to a joint session of the legislature.

As many as 11 new Bills listed by the state government and those pending from the previous session will be taken up for discussions during this session, scheduled to be held till February 5.

Assembly Speaker Vishweshwar Hegde Kageri said they have also decided to have a debate on the "One Nation One Election" idea during the session, and one day will be fixed for this after further discussions.

The state government will also soon announce the date for the budget session to be held in March, he said. P7

Basavaraj Horatti for Council chairman?

There are indications that the BJP and JD(S) will join hands for the post of Legislative Council Chairman and Deputy Chairman. On Wednesday, JD(S) candidate for the Chairman post, Basavaraj Horatti, met Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa and sought the BJP's support. P4

EXPRESS READ

Soldier martyred in IED blast in J&K

Srinagar: Terrorists targeted an Army road opening party in south Kashmir's Kulgam district on Wednesday, killing a soldier and injuring three others. Police said the IED went off in the premises of Government Middle School. P10

Sourav Ganguly hospitalised again

Kolkata: BCCI president and former Team India captain Sourav Ganguly was on Wednesday hospitalised again with discomfort in the chest, less than a month after he underwent angioplasty here. P10

ByteDance to lay off India workforce

Bengaluru: China's ByteDance will shut its India business and cut the 2,000-plus employees to a bare minimum over uncertainty in making a comeback following a ban on its TikTok video app in the country. P15

SASIKALA OUT OF PRISON, BUT HOSPITAL STAY WILL CONTINUE

BALA CHAUHAN @ Bengaluru

EXPELLED All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) leader **V K Sasikala** was released from judicial custody on Wednesday morning after she completed her four-year prison sentence in a disproportionate assets (DA) case. Sasikala was lodged in judicial custody at the Bengaluru Central Prison since February 2017 along with her sister-in-law J Ilavarasi and nephew Sudhakaran.

According to sources, a prison officer, accompanied by her lawyer Raja, went inside the Trauma Care Centre (TCC) at Victoria Hospital, where she is being treated for Covid-19, and took her signature for formal release from the prison.

"The Covid-19 protocols were followed while completing the release formalities," the sources said.

The hospital later conducted an RT-PCR test on Sasikala today to check her Covid status. They will repeat the test on January 30, which will be the tenth day since she tested positive. "Sasikala will be discharged from the hospital if two of her tests come negative. She is stable, conscious, alert and well oriented," stated the Bangalore Medical College and Research Institute (BMRCI) in a health bulletin. The hospital added that the "decision to continue her treatment in Victoria Hospital has been taken by her and her family members."

Sasikala's nephew and founder of the Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam (AMMK), T T V Dhinakaran, along with relatives and party workers, came to Victoria Hospital to celebrate her release from prison. A large crowd, which had gathered outside the hospital, raised slogans in favour of Sasikala and distributed sweets soon after she was formally released from prison.

"Dhinakaran tried to meet his aunt, but was not allowed inside due to Covid-19," said sources. "Sasikala's family and party workers have planned to come in large numbers to take her back to Chennai with much fanfare," they added.

On January 20, Sasikala was taken to Bowring Hospital after she had come down with fever, lung infection and breathlessness in the Bengaluru Central Prison. The hospital had conducted an RT-PCR test in which she had tested negative, but her chest X-ray showed lung infection. She was shifted to Victoria Hospital the next day for a CT scan. An RT-PCR test was conducted again and she had tested positive.

POOLS FOR ALL, MORE CAN WATCH MOVIES

50% seating cap on cinema halls and theatres lifted, says the latest Union home ministry advisory. New standard operating procedure (SOP) to be issued by I&B ministry to lay down norms

Swimming pools permitted for use of sports persons now open for all
B2B exhibition halls already permitted, now all types of exhibition halls can function

Further opening up of international air travel of passengers based on assessment of the situation

Persons above **65 years** of age, persons with co-morbidities, pregnant women and children below the age of 10 advised to take precautions while moving out P9

RACE AGAINST TIME

Experts cite expiry date, call for speeding up vax drive

CHETANA BELAGERE @ Bengaluru

THE State Government needs to accelerate its vaccination process, experts say, as it is not just about completing the first phase of vaccination within the stipulated time, but also the fact that the vaccines — both Covishield and Covaxin — which are being given to health workers in the first phase, have a shelf life of only six months.

While the Covishield vaccine doses, which have reached Karnataka, have a manufacturing date of November 3, 2020, the expiry reads May 1, 2021. The Covaxin has a manufacturing date of December 2020 and expires in May 2021. This means that the first batch of 9,40,740 doses of vaccines, including both Covishield and Covaxin, has to be administered by May 5. The state has so far inoculated 2,66,151 beneficiaries.

"We have to accelerate the process of vaccination. This way, we will take much longer to achieve the set target. We have to escalate the speed of coverage by measures like having additional vaccination sites and also allowing walk-in vaccination. While zero wastage of vaccination is often not possible, the government should keep in mind that the vaccines are precious now and should not be wasted," Dr C N Manjunath, Director, Sri Jayadeva Institute of Cardiovascular Sciences and Research, said.

A health worker with a vial of the Covishield vaccine | ASHISHKRISHNA HP

According to experts, the vaccines have already been kept in cold-storage during pre-production and the stockpile of lakhs of doses are waiting to be procured by the Central Government. "We have to start working backwards depending on the dates on the vials. We cannot afford to waste any vaccine. We have to plan and figure out strategies. While the vaccines have to already be kept in cold storage, there may be temperature fluctuations and the like which may impact the vials. It would be ideal for the state to complete the planned phases by February-March so that they could use the vials without wasting any," senior bioethics researcher Anant Bhan said.

Pointing out that hesitancy, doubts about vaccine efficacy, fears of side effects and some unconfirmed news about deaths had affected phase-1 of the vaccination drive, Health Commissioner Pankaj Kumar Pandey said people are now coming forward to take the vaccine. "The government is also working out detailed plans and strategies to ensure that phase-1 of the vaccination drive is completed to begin the second dose for healthcare workers in the next 12 to 13 days," he said. P7